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Religions in al-Ḥarālī's Sufi Hermeneutics: An Apolemical Understanding of the Qur'ān

Adnane Mokrani ^{1,2,3} 

¹ The Giorgio La Pira Library and Research Centre on the History and Doctrines of Islam, The Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose (FSCIRE), 90137 Palermo, Italy; amokrania@hotmail.com

² Faculty of Missiology, Pontifical Gregorian University, 00187 Rome, Italy

³ Department of History, Patrimony and Protestant Theology, "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, 550024 Sibiu, Romania

Abstract: This article analyzes the three introductory epistles to Sufi hermeneutics written by al-Ḥarālī, a mystic of Andalusian origin from the seventh/thirteenth century. According to this author, the objective of the Scriptures is to explain human beings to themselves. The revelation, received through a particular understanding called *fahm*, contains transformative knowledge that can change the life of the reader. In this foundational work, al-Ḥarālī explains the relationship between the Qur'ān and preceding Scriptures, recognizing in the Qur'ān their unity and fulfillment. Dedicating the final chapter of the third epistle to the seven religions mentioned in the Qur'ān, which are, rather, ethical prototypes, he seeks to internalize the Qur'ānic critique expounded on each of these categories. In a reading that goes beyond polemics and offers significant elements to the Islamic theology of religions, al-Ḥarālī demonstrates how the aim of the Qur'ānic narratives is not to present information about the past but rather to provide moral education for the Islamic community and the reader.

Keywords: Sufi hermeneutics; Sufi tafsīr; Qur'ānic exegesis; Islamic theology of religions; Qur'ānic narratives; Islamic polemics



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1. Introduction

The introduction to tafsīr written by al-Ḥarālī (d. 638/1241) is the first theoretical elaboration of this discipline in general and of Sufi tafsīr in particular. By this historical period (seventh/thirteenth century), Sufism had reached significant expansion and maturity, which allowed for a pause for theoretical reflection on methodology. Indeed, the introduction to tafsīr written a century later by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), the antithesis of that of al-Ḥarālī, has long been considered the first methodological treatise in this field and is still a reference, especially in modern times in Salafi circles (cf. [Ibn Taymiyya 1971](#); [Saleh 2013](#), pp. 123–62). The study of al-Ḥarālī's work offers an inclusive vision of historical reality that has been little studied until now.

In his introductory work, al-Ḥarālī is notable for his 'apolemic' approach to the religions mentioned in the Qur'ān. Over the centuries, Qur'ānic criticism of other religions has become the basis of Islamic polemics. On the other hand, Sufism represents a more compassionate approach to the religious other, compared with Kalām polemics.¹ It sees in polemics the danger of arrogance that looks only at the faults of others while ignoring its own. Controversy can turn into scapegoating, casting all the blame on others in order to justify and glorify one's own ego. This poses a real risk for Sufism, whose goal is to free human beings from the chains of egoism. The technique used by al-Ḥarālī to neutralize this risk is to regard every Qur'ānic discourse on other religions as one addressed to Muslims themselves and to the reader. In this light, the fault of the other is merely given as an example to be avoided, so our concern with it is personal, since it may be our own. Without generalizing the criticism or considering it as a sign of superiority, the reader of the Qur'ān

checks whether these faults apply to himself/herself first. This approach can be called an act of “internalization” of the Qur’ānic discourse, which aims at transforming the soul of the reader rather than informing him or her about past events. It is seen as information that leads to transformative consciousness.

2. Biography

Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan b. Ibrāhīm al-Tuġībī al-Ḥarālī or al-Ḥarrālī,² of Andalusian origin, from Ḥarālla, a village near Murcia,³ was born in Marrakesh or Ceuta in Dū al-Ḥiġġa 582 (February/March 1187).⁴ He began his studies in the Maghreb and continued them as a young man in the various cities of the Levant, Mašriq. Making two journeys, he passed through various cities such as Fez, Ceuta, Biġāya, Tunis, Alexandria, Cairo, Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, Damascus, Ḥomṣ and Ḥamā. After the first journey, he returned to the Maghreb as a sage and teacher. Later, he stopped again in Biġāya, but was forced to leave and returned to the East to finally reside in Ḥamā, where he died on 12 Ša‘bān 638 (4 March 1241) (Ġubrīnī 1979, pp. 153–54; Ibn al-Ṭawwāḥ 2007, p. 98). He was a learned man with a vast knowledge of the Islamic, philosophical, and natural sciences. He was best known for Sufism and Qur’ānic exegesis.

Both al-Ḥarālī and Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) were Andalusians from Murcia. They share not only travel routes but also some masters. While they are part of the same Sufi orientation, Ibn ‘Arabī is unparalleled in terms of his literary output, his fame and the scholarly interest in his work. Ibn al-Ṭawwāḥ (d. after 718/1318) reports that Ibn ‘Arabī asked al-Ḥarālī, being similar, to leave Damascus.⁵ So, al-Ḥarālī moved to Ḥamā, where he died a few months after Ibn ‘Arabī.

Al-Ḥarālī was apparently a Sunni scholar, although some of his texts suggest that he may have been Shiite or at least influenced by Shiism.⁶ This is characteristic of Sufism, which was developed on the overlapping boundaries between Sunnism and Shiism, allowing for mutual exchange and influence. This observation also applies to Ibn ‘Arabī and other Andalusian Sufis before them, such as Ibn Masarra (d. 319/931) (cf. Ebstein 2014; Nasr 1970).

Two episodes in al-Ḥarālī’s life illustrate his ties with other religions and reveal his spiritual character. Al-Dahabī (d. 748/1348) narrates that an unknown man, probably in Damascus or Ḥamā, tried to provoke al-Ḥarālī, who was preaching, by declaring that he was the son of a Jewish convert. Al-Ḥarālī reacted calmly, saying, “May God give you good news for your testimony that my father died a Muslim!”⁷ This reaction testifies to al-Ḥarālī’s ability to control his emotions without succumbing to provocation. At the same time, however, it might indicate that he was indeed of Jewish origin since he did not deny what the man said. This detail would cast doubt on his affiliation with the Arab tribe of Tuġīb. In fact, several Andalusian figures invented an Arab genealogy for reasons of social prestige, especially when power was in the hands of the Umayyads.⁸ Some biographers say that al-Ḥarālī’s father was a Muslim Šayḥ (Mundīrī 1985, vol. 3, p. 560), but this does not contradict the possible Jewish origin. Another hypothesis is that this provocation was due to al-Ḥarālī’s openness toward other religions, attributing that openness to supposedly non-Islamic roots.

The second episode, narrated by Ibn al-Ṭawwāḥ, is the letter that al-Ḥarālī wrote, probably during his second stay in Biġāya, to the archbishop of Tarragona Ferrer de Pallarés (d. 1243) (cf. Casewit 2019, pp. 207–13), asking him to release his captive relatives who had been taken prisoner during an attack on the island of Majorca. Having no money to pay the ransom, al-Ḥarālī tried to persuade the archbishop in the name of common humanity and shared Abrahamic origin:

In the name of God [...] He who created all humankind from one soul and fashioned their bodies from the surface of one earth, making them, in truth, [the offspring] of one womb. If they truly knew each other, considering what their bodies have in common, what their souls have as unique in the one soul, and what their spirits have actualized in the Spirit of God, they would no longer sever

relations nor spill each other's blood nor pounce on each other in the manner of lions pouncing on sheep.

[...] Unless individuals among the virtuous and great sages who have respected the right of kinship and religion (*qaḍaw ḥaqq al-raḥim wa al-milla*),⁹ who have been realized in the Spirit of God and thus purified, maintaining relations in nearness and distance, and who have been freed from the abomination of mutual hatred and obstinacy in such a way that they have not been burned by the fire of separation, and [this fire] has become cool and safe for them, just as the blazing fire had become such for their ancestor Abraham. This is because they returned with their hearts to the Origin and paid no attention to the accidental dispersion (*ṣatāt*), remaining faithful to the best unity. (Ibn al-Ṭawwāḥ 2007, pp. 99–100. See also: F. Casewit 2019, pp. 213–14; Van Koningsveld 1995, pp. 8–9)

There is a detail in the letter that indicates al-Ḥarālī's methodology of tafsīr. He mentions the miracle of Abraham cited in these verses: "They said, 'Burn him and avenge your gods if you are going to do the right thing'. But We said, 'Fire, be cool and safe for Abraham'. They planned to harm him, but We made them suffer the greatest loss." (Q 21, 68–70).¹⁰ Al-Ḥarālī interprets the fire symbolically as the fire of hatred and anger that wants to kill the love in the heart of the believer. This fire becomes cool and safe for the believer, impervious to hatred. As will be explained in detail in this article, interpreting the Qur'ānic narrative in this way is an essential feature of his methodology. It exemplifies the act of internalization that makes the story relevant and alive in the soul of the reader.

Eventually, the Muslim prisoners were freed. It is not known whether this was because of the letter or as a result of a truce between the Ḥafṣids and the kingdom of Aragon. Nevertheless, Ibn al-Ṭawwāḥ reports that the archbishop was astonished by the letter and considered it "outside the laws (religions) (*ḥāriḡ aḥkām al-ṣarā'ī*)" (Ibn al-Ṭawwāḥ 2007, p. 100). In fact, he sent a letter to the Ḥafṣid Emir of Tunis, Abū Zakariyyā Ibn Ḥafṣ, who asked his son Abū Yaḥyā, who was the governor of Biḡāya, to force al-Ḥarālī to leave the East and never return to the Maghreb. The letter was probably considered "heretical" by both Christians and Muslims. Al-Ḥarālī got what he sought with the letter, the liberation of his relatives, but he paid for it with his exile.

These biographical details explain al-Ḥarālī's openness toward other religions, which has a theological and exegetical basis, as an 'apolemic' spiritual vision that seeks to see the positive side of the other even in times of war.

3. Works

Until the 1970s, with the publication in Hyderabad of *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa al-suwar* in 22 volumes, the great tafsīr work of al-Biqā'ī (d. 808/1460), al-Ḥarālī was unknown in modern academic research.¹¹ In al-Biqā'ī's work, al-Ḥarālī's tafsīr of the first quarter of the Qur'ān, now lost, was at least partially preserved. In 1997, Muḥammādī al-Ḥayyātī (Mohammadi Elkhayati) collected all the quotations from al-Ḥarālī's tafsīr in al-Biqā'ī's work (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 235–594). Al-Biqā'ī is known in the history of tafsīr as one of the advocates of using the Bible as an exegetical source (cf. Saleh 2008; McCoy III 2021).

Despite the loss of al-Ḥarālī's tafsīr, his introductory epistles to the Sufi methodology of tafsīr have been handed down to us and are the subject of this study:

- (a) *Miftāḥ al-bāb al-muqfal li-fahm al-qur'ān al-munzal or al-munazzal* (the key to the closed door for understanding the revealed Qur'ān), followed by the page number. The title is inspired by the Qur'ānic verse: "Will they not contemplate the Qur'ān? Do they have locks on their hearts?" This epistle consists of an introduction and ten chapters (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 24–54).
- (b) *Al-Urwa lil-miftāḥ al-fātiḥ lil-bāb al-muqfal* (the ring of the key that opens the closed door), consisting of two parts with seven chapters each (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 55–117).
- (c) *Al-Tawṣiya wa al-tawfiya* (the adornment and fulfillment), consisting of two chapters (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 119–41). This article pays special attention to the last chapter, which

is relatively long and discusses the seven religions mentioned in the Qur'ān. The author considers this epistle as a deepening of the second one (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 120). However, the unity of the contents of the three epistles allows them to be considered as one book, as can be seen from the complementarity of their titles.

This article is not limited to a theoretical analysis of al-Ḥarālī's introduction to tafsīr. It is mainly concerned with its impact on the Islamic theology of religions.

All translations from these three epistles are mine.

4. Sufi Hermeneutics

4.1. Al-Miftāḥ

Al-Ḥarālī argues from the very beginning of the book that he is contributing foundational theoretical work for understanding the Qur'ān, like a foundation of grammar, logic, or theory of law (*Uṣūl al-fiqh*). This theoretical introduction also involves spiritual purification, *tazkiya*, a meeting of human predisposition and divine gift (*hiba*) (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 25–26, 28).

The author distinguishes three levels of the science of the Qur'ān (*ilm al-Qur'ān*): *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, and *fahm*. While these terms are usually translated as explanation (commentary), interpretation (return to the origin), and understanding, he assigns new meanings to these words instead:

- (a) *Tafsīr* is the worldly level of Qur'ānic knowledge, which sees the appearance of the text in the “day of earthly life (*yawm al-dunyā*)”, using the tools of “grammar and literature” (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 26, 28). This is philological and rhetorical commentary, which remains a veil if it is not overcome.
- (b) *Ta'wīl* is the philosophical and theological level in perspective of the “Last Day (*yawm al-āhira*)”. It is “the science of faith”, knowing that “hearing is not the same as seeing” (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 26–27). The author warns that “rational preconceptions (*sābiq āra' aqliyya*)” can be a veil when theological schools “try to make the Qur'ān follow them and not follow the Qur'ān themselves” (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 28).
- (c) *Fahm* is “to understand what [the Qur'ān] is constantly, beyond night and day” (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 26). The perennial and universal transformative principle is the highest level of the Qur'ānic meaning, and it is to this that the author dedicates these epistles. In this article, *fahm* is defined as “understanding” in the sense established by the author.

Al-Ḥarālī attributes this approach to his master Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Qurṭubī (d. 631/1233), a resident of Medina¹² who contributed to the science of understanding. “God purified him with asceticism, standing before the door of God for twenty years”, as the author writes, quoting the verse “reciting His revelations to them, and purifying them, and teaching them the Scripture and wisdom” (Q 62, 2) (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 27). He continues: “We received from him the understanding of [the sūra of] the Opening for four months. He taught the laws that lead to understanding, and they have, for the understanding of the Qur'ān, the same position as *Uṣūl al-fiqh* for law (*al-aḥkām*)” (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 25, 27–28).

The concept of understanding (*fahm*) is closely related to the purpose of the Qur'ān, which is to reveal creatures to themselves (in their essences, *dawāt*) by showing the places of manifestations of the divine Names, to wit, the divine Presence in them, as stated in the title of the third chapter (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 33). Indeed, the Qur'ān expresses the human being better than human beings themselves do:

Know that God, the Sublime, has favored his servants with the Qur'ān, which speaks about them and about every creature and establishes every command (*amr*), in a way that cannot be expressed by them. (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 33)

The Qur'ān outlines the different degrees of the “[spiritual] development of the human being, growing in faith or degrading in disbelief” (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 34). The ability to understand depends on a person's spiritual degree: “The Qur'ān manifests itself according to the value of the essence of each creature, and according to the characteristics of proximity or distance [from God]” (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 34). “The Qur'ān establishes each creature for

what it was created" (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 34). It is not a matter of age but of "the degree of maturity of the heart" (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 42).

Another critical point in this view is the relationship between "the descents of the Qur'ānic discourse according to the Names of God", which is the title of the fifth chapter (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 37), and the spiritual state of human beings. Al-Ḥarālī ascribes to the Qur'ān an educational mission, which derives from the divine Name *Rabb*, often translated as Lord. In this context, it would be best translated as "Educator." The same applies to Lordship (*rubūbiyya*), as divine Education. This interpretation takes into account the root of the word and its connection with the verb *rabbā*, which means to educate. The Qur'ān is a divine instrument of guidance that enables human beings to know themselves and the reason for their creation, informing them of their essence and identity (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 41).

The author relies on the principle that "he who knows himself, knows his Lord (Educator)", without attributing it to any source (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 41). This knowledge cannot be separated from the understanding of the Creator and His signs in creation, inside and outside the human soul:

Know that signs (*āyāt*) and states (*aḥwāl*) are ascribed and set in harmony for those who have the qualification that enables them to conceive their meanings [...]. All creation is but science for the *ʾitibār* and does not exist for the [mere] satisfaction [of men]. (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 45)

The concept of *ʾibra* is central to al-Ḥarālī's view. This word is often translated as teaching, warning, lesson, consideration, or contemplation. The term *ʾitibār* means the mental act of drawing a *ʾibra*, a lesson. According to the author, it means drawing transformative knowledge from the creation and the Qur'ān, knowledge that changes people and their lives and makes them "gain their souls (or themselves) (*kasb^{an} li-anfusihim*)" (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 45). In this sense, it is a salvific knowledge.¹³

The concept of *ʾitibār* places al-Ḥarālī in the line of Andalusian mystics who preceded him, in what Yousef Casewit calls "the Mu'tabirūn tradition", to wit, the people of *ʾitibār*, such as Ibn Masarra (d. 319/931) and Ibn Barraḡān (d. 536/1141) (cf. Y. Casewit 2019, pp. 33–39, 114–15, 269–75; Stroumsa and Svirī 2009, pp. 201–53).

One of the key ideas in the first epistle is that "the Qur'ān contains all the books of all religions and their manners of expression" (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 50):

- (a) In the Torah, God's rules for His servants in this world are manifested through penalties (*ḥudūd*), afflictions, hardships, and adversities. In the Qur'ān, [there is] much of this [category],¹⁴ evident in jurisprudence (*fiqh*), in terms of penalties, and in the Sufis' skills regarding the acceptance of afflictions.
- (b) In the Gospel (*al-inḡīl*), the principles or origins (*uṣūl*) of these rules are mentioned, clarifying that they are not the actual purpose but rather what lies beyond them concerning the command (*amr*) of the [divine] Kingdom (*malakūt*). In the Qur'ān, [there is] much of this [category], evident through the Kingdom's knowledge and wisdom.
- (c) The Psalms are the music that enchants people and gives their souls the strength to walk towards their Lord (Educator).¹⁵ The guidance of creation and their separation from themselves towards their Lord is emphasized. In the Qur'ān, [there is] much of this [category], purified by good exhortation.
- (d) Then, God completed the command and creation from all aspects, so that it became a comprehensive Qur'ān for all, fulfilling the grace and perfecting the religion (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 50–51).

The author explains the relationship between the Qur'ān and the earlier Scriptures, as well as the relationships between the Scriptures. The Torah is the book of the practical aspect of religion, containing the law, the equivalent of Islamic jurisprudence and practical Sufism that helps endure the hardships of life (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 50–51). It is the severe face of life and revelation. Conversely, the Gospel is the spiritual background of these practices, in which they find their origin and meaning. It is the divine Kingdom (*malakūt*) and the purposes of the way, complementing and deepening the law. The Psalms represent the

aesthetic and artistic aspect that empowers souls to run towards God in the image of the caravan led by the camel driver's song. The Qur'ān, as the ultimate revelation, is all of these. It is an overcoming that confirms and unites the earlier Scriptures.

It is in this context that the concept of the mother of the Qur'ān (*Umm al-Qur'ān*) is to be understood. The term is similar to that of the mother of the Book (*Umm al-kitāb*), mentioned in (Q 3,7; 13, 39; 43, 4), which contains the inclusive principles (*ḡawāmi'*), united in it and scattered throughout the Qur'ān and other Scriptures (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 50–51).

In the following epistle, the author explains the Seal (*ḥātam*) qualification, attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad and the Qur'ān, in the sense of a “perfect inclusive (unifying) (*al-ḡāmi' al-kāmil*)” (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 57). Thus, the Qur'ān has eschatological significance as a sign of the end of time, since “the Day of Resurrection (*ma'ād*) begins with its appearance” (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 57).

4.2. Al-Urwa

In this epistle, al-Ḥarālī explains the inclusive principles (*ḡawāmi'*) of the Qur'ān, mentioned in the first epistle, starting from a famous saying of the Prophet Muḥammad: “The Qur'ān was revealed in seven *aḥruf*.”¹⁶ The author understands the term *aḥruf* (sing. *ḥarf*), usually translated as letters, as thematic categories, that also, at the same time, reflect different spiritual states of the human being. Each theme begins in earlier Scriptures and finds its fulfillment in the Qur'ān. Six of these categories are paired to form three mega-categories, each with a positive and a negative side. The seventh *ḥarf*, then, is the unity and complementarity of all categories beyond any duality:

- [I] The two lowest categories are those of the integrity of earthly life (*ṣalāḥ al-dunyā*), which have their origin in the Torah and their fulfillment in the Qur'ān:
 - [1] The category of the illicit (*ḥarf al-ḥarām*), from which the “integrity of soul and body demands purification” (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 57). It is a narrow category that leads to patience (*ṣabr*) (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 102).
 - [2] The category of the licit (*ḥarf al-ḥalāl*), which the “integrity of soul and body demands” (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 57). It is a broad category that leads to gratitude (*ṣukr*) (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 102).
- [II] The two categories of the integrity of the hereafter (*ṣalāḥ al-āḥira*), which have their origin in the Gospel and their fulfillment in the Qur'ān:
 - [3] The category of rebuke and prohibition (*ḥarf al-zaḡr wa al-nahy*). This is an ascetic level that demands the renunciation of many lawful things for the sake of eternal life. The preference for the latter is due to its permanence and inclusiveness compared to earthly life, which is ephemeral and partial.
 - [4] The category of command (*ḥarf al-amr*), on which the good of the hereafter depends. This is a more demanding ethical level, that of holiness, which requires the purification of the heart and intentions from all kinds of associationism (*ṣirk*) (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 106), without waiting for recompense (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 110–11).

Mega-categories I and II represent two ethical levels: the minimal or common ethics, the ethics of duty, on the one hand, and the maximal ethics of sainthood and love, on the other. In the origin, there was love; duty appears as the fruit of sin. Genuine and authentic “prayer is sowing love (*al-ṣalāt biḍār al-ḥubb*)”¹⁷ (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 66):

Prayer was [an act of] love before it became obligatory. Giving what is more than one's necessity was a definite and widespread action among them [the Companions of the Prophet]; they knew nothing outside of it and perceived nothing in Islam but it. When Islam spread to a mixture of people and the mind became miserly, [for that] compulsory almsgiving (*zakaṭ*), was instituted, and its types were defined. This happened in Medina when

riches increased, God's goods spread, and the hypocrisy of certain arrogant people appeared because of their share of power. (Harāllī 1997, pp. 68–69)

[III] The two categories of the integrity of religion (*ṣalāḥ al-dīn*) have their origin in all Scripture and their fulfillment in the Qur'ān:

- [5] The category of the explicit (*ḥarf al-muḥkam*), in which “the speech of the Educator (*Rabb*) is clear, both for the states of the heart, the morals of the soul, and the acts of the body, without regard to the desire and hope of the soul in this earthly life” (Harāllī 1997, p. 58).
- [6] The category of the ambiguous (*ḥarf al-mutaṣābih*) is the sphere of Mystery in which the human being is incapable of understanding. The previous five categories are categories to be used. However, the sixth requires pausing, acknowledging one's limitations and inability, and expressing one's submission (*islām*) to God (Harāllī 1997, pp. 58, 81).

The author considers *al-muḥkam* to be common to all religions, corresponding to the innate nature (*fiṭra*), in which the human being was created. *Al-mutaṣābih*, on the other hand, is the cause of divergences and divisions between religions and schools of the same religion (Harāllī 1997, p. 80). The author does not rule out the possibility of understanding *al-mutaṣābih* through inspiration as a divine gift. (Harāllī 1997, pp. 70, 86) In other words, *al-muḥkam* represents God's speech about human beings, and *al-mutaṣābih* represents God's speech about God (Harāllī 1997, p. 113).

- [7] The seventh category (*al-ḥarf al-sābi'*) is also called the inclusive category (*al-ḥarf al-ḡāmi'*), and the category of the supreme model (*ḥarf al-maṭal*). Another name for this is the category of praise (*ḥarf al-ḥamd*), the unique feature of Muḥammad, the praised one, and the Qur'ān. As was mentioned in the first epistle, this category has the added value of unity and complementarity with all the previous categories. The novelty of the Qur'ān is that it contains the Torah, the Gospels, and all the Scriptures.

At this point, the author returns to the concept of the “Mother of the Qur'ān” and the “Mother of the Book,” which unites the inclusive principles (*ḡawāmi'*) of all the Qur'ān and all the Scriptures, and which can be represented by the first sūra, the Opening (*al-fātiḥa*), which begins with “praise” (*al-ḥamd*).¹⁸ He then mentions the correspondence between the seven categories and the seven verses of the sūra. Thus, all the Scriptures are included in the Qur'ān, and the whole Qur'ān is included in its first chapter.

The author uses the term *aḥruf* or *hurūf* not only for the Qur'ān but also for all creatures, drawing a parallel between the Qur'ān and the Scriptures on the one hand, and the cosmic book “written” by God, on the other. This idea is related to that of creation through the Word and creation as revelation. Al-Harallī insists on the complementarity between human beings and creation. The perfect predisposition of the human being makes him or her capable of understanding the Word of God in the Scriptures and the cosmos. Transformative understanding (*fahm*) is possible because of the presence of the divine Spirit and Light in the human being:

Know that God Almighty created Adam with His own Hands, breathed into him from His Spirit, and granted him light from His Light. Therefore, because He created him with His own Hands, he was made in the best form. And because He breathed into him from His Spirit, he had the most complete life, both in contraction and expansion. And because He granted him light from His Light, he had the purest intellect, the sincerest heart, the clearest speech, the most eloquent expression, both in synthesis and detail, showing him the *hurūf* of His creatures that He wrote, letting him understand and feel them. (Harāllī 1997, p. 90)

4.3. *Al-Tawṣiya*

4.3.1. The Centrality of Mercy

The epistle begins with the centrality of mercy and its precedence over justice, both as ethics and as a hermeneutical key. The Prophet Muḥammad is presented as the Qur'ānic model par excellence, being merciful by nature (*ḡibilla*), and the synthesis and goal of the Qur'ān. The novelty of al-Ḥarālī is that the Prophet is not only the personification of the Qur'ān, a doctrine common among Muslims, but is also the personification of the previous Scriptures (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 125), based on the idea that the Qur'ān is the synthesis of these Scriptures. In the beginning, there was mercy; justice is only the exception. The Prophet applied justice only when he had to, after waiting for the repentance of the sinner and the forgiveness of the Creator (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 121–25).

The complementarity and unity between the text and the human being is fundamental for the reader who lives the text. The personification of the Qur'ānic text is manifest and complete in the Prophet. However, it is also found in varying degrees in each reader who experiences the revelation:

The totality of the Qur'ān contains the whole of the Umma (the Islamic community) and every reader who reads it among the people of understanding (*fahm*), and certainty (*iqān*). (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 126)

The description of Muḥammad explains the correspondence between Qur'ānic ethics and prophetic ethics:

Know that God, the Sublime, sent Muḥammad with Mercy to all worlds [Q 21, 107], made his character forgiveness and benevolence, as mentioned in previous Books: “I make forgiveness and benevolence his character”. And this was recommended to him, as transmitted by him, when he said: “My Lord (Educator) has recommended to me, without a translator or mediator, seven qualities: to fear God in secret and in public, to treat well those who have excluded me, to forgive those who have attacked me, to give to those who have deprived me, let my word be a prayer, and my silence be meditation, my gaze a consideration (*ibra*)”. (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 121)

The author cites previous Scriptures without a specific reference to prove that the Prophet was the personification of the Qur'ān and the Scriptures in general. It is also related to the idea that the Prophet Muhammad was mentioned in the Bible as good news or a prophecy (*biṣāra*).

4.3.2. Typology of Religions

In the last chapter, which is relatively long, the author explicates how the purpose of Qur'ānic narratives is not to present information about the past (*iḥbār*), but to provide transformative awareness (*itibār*), and a warning (*tanbīh*), because “for all past [communities], there is an example repeated in this concluding community (*al-umma al-ḥātima*). As [the Prophet] said: For every Prophet before me, a correspondent in my community” (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 126–27). The author also uses another Ḥadīth: “‘You will follow the ways of those nations who were before you, span by span and cubit by cubit, so much so that even if they entered a hole of a mastigure, you would follow them’. We said, ‘O God’s Messenger! [Do you mean] the Jews and the Christians?’ He said, ‘Whom else?’” (Buhārī 2002, Ḥadīth 7320, p. 1808) (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 130, 135). Al-Ḥarālī also quotes some Qur'ānic verses, such as, “You are like those who lived before you: they were even stronger than you, with more wealth and children; they enjoyed their share in this life as you have enjoyed yours; like them, you have indulged in idle talk. Their deeds go to waste in this world and the next; it is they who will lose all in the life to come” (Q 9, 69) (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 130).

According to al-Ḥarālī’s classification, there are seven religions (*al-adyān al-sab’a*) in the Qur'ān (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 127–28), and these are reflected in different ways in the Islamic Umma. Following the Qur'ānic model, the author does not name religions, such as Judaism

or Christianity, but rather religious communities, such as Jews and Christians. These fluid groups represent ethical prototypes and patterns of religiosity that cross religions.

The first religion is that of “those who believe” (*allaḍīna āmanū*), who are not as stable in their faith as the “true believers” (*al-mu’minūn ḥaqq^{an}*). This distinction is based on a series of verses that rebuke “those who believe” for their shortcomings, such as: “You who believe, be mindful of God: stand with those who are true” (Q 9, 119; see also 4, 137; 5, 54). The author also draws on other verses extolling the fine qualities of the true believers, such as, “True believers are those whose hearts tremble with awe when God is mentioned, whose faith increases when His revelations are recited to them, who put their trust in their Lord, who keep up the prayer and give to others out of what We provide for them. Those are the ones who truly believe (*al-mu’minūn ḥaqq^{an}*). They have high standing with their Lord, forgiveness, and generous provision” (Q 8, 2–4; see also 74) (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 128).

Those who are solid and stable in faith are the true believers and those in the two other groups of an even higher level, mentioned only by name: the people of perfection (*al-muḥsinūn*),¹⁹ and the people of certainty (*al-mūqinūn*) (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 127, 130). These people are beyond or above the categories and will be “completely saved (*al-nāḡūn bi-l-kulliyya*)” (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 130). On the other hand, the people of the seven categories or religions, “them or among them” (*hum aw minhum*), will be the inhabitants of the seven degrees of hell (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 130). The “people of unstable religiosity” are not only Muslims but also among their counterparts in the three religions of Judaism, Christianity and Sabianism, who have a “foundation of authenticity” (*aṣl min al-ṣiḥḥa*). They are mentioned in the verse: “Those who believe, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians, all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good, will have their rewards with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve” (Q 2, 62. See also Q 5, 69) (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 128).

The second religion is that of the Jews. The author does not generalize the criticism of the three religions (Judaism, Christianity and Sabianism); he always uses the expression “among them” (*minhum*), before citing a criticism, which is faithful to Qur’ānic usage (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 129).²⁰

The third religion is that of Christians, and “among them” are those who have strayed and exaggerated in their faith (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 129).

Al-Ḥarālī notes that the most significant similarity is between a section of Muslims and some groups of Jews and Christians:

Some groups [of the Islamic community] have gone far in resembling Jews and Christians in their discord and fragmentation, in the rule of their kings and sultans over their prophets, wise men and saints (*awliyā*). (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 135)

[...] God gave them the Book, science, and wisdom. Still, they divided themselves because of ambitions and passions, preferring the worldly life, tolerating the kings and rulers who made lawful to them what God forbade and unlawful what God permitted. They instrumentalize [the commandments] to attack those they envy among the people of sincerity and piety, increasing injustice among them. (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 135)

The author seems rather pessimistic, and his messianic hope is postponed until the end times:

This is their stable state [Muslims], similar to that [of Jews and Christians], inflicted with similar punishments. This has extended from the time when the caliphate became a kingdom,²¹ [and will remain] until the end of the wars, when all communities will become one community, emerging from divisions toward the harmony of faith in the one God (*tawḥūd*). (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 135–36)

The characteristic of the *Ṣarī’a* is to unite the manifest (*ẓāhir*) and the hidden (*bāṭin*):

Those who limit themselves to the legal form (*ẓāhir ṣarī*), without profound truth (*ḥaqīqa bāṭina*), are the Jews of this [Islamic] community. They observe the apparent states to secure the worldly life and please the kings and sultans of the

time. Losing at the same time the inner acts, they deny the states of the people of truth. Their fears and hopes are attached to the people of this low world.

[...] On the other hand, those who limit themselves in the inclusive Muḥammadian Ṣarī'a to the esoteric part (*bāṭin*), perfecting the [spiritual] state or heart, neglecting the appearance of the command, the gatherings of good and solidarity among Muslims²² [...] are among the Christians of this community (*Umma*). (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 136)

Al-Ḥarālī starts from the famous Ḥadīṭ, known as Ḥadīṭ Ġibrīl (Muslim 1991, K. al-īmān, Ḥadīṭ 1, pp. 36–37), to emphasize the unity between the three dimensions of religion: *islām*, the practical and external aspect; *īmān*, faith, to wit, the doctrinal and theological aspect; and *iḥsān*, the inner and spiritual part. The author criticizes fragmentary religiosity that fails to realize the vital unity between these dimensions:

The pseudo-jurist (*mutafaqqih*),²³ who denies sincerity in the states of the Sufis (*ṣūfiyya*) for what he might see of the faults of the pseudo-Sufis (*mutaṣawwifa*), in truth follows the way (*sunna*) of the Jews. And when the pseudo-Sufi despises the jurists for what he might see as flaws in the states of the pseudo-jurists, he follows the way of the Christians. The same goes for the theologian (*mutakallim*), regardless of affiliations. The trustworthy guides (*imam*) of religion are those in whom God has unified the realization of the signs of *islām*, the faith of the people of *īmān*, and the testimony of the people of *iḥsān*.

[...] He who limits himself to the appearance/the exoteric aspect (*ẓāhir*), denying the inwardness/the esoteric aspect (*bāṭin*), is bound by the criticism against the Jews and what has been revealed in the Qur'ān concerning them, according to [the degree of] his involvement. And he who limits himself to the esoteric aspect without considering the exoteric aspect is bound by the criticism against Christians and by what has been revealed in the Qur'ān in their regard. (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 137)

Al-Ḥarālī relates an anecdote that illustrates this biased attitude:

A man among the righteous Muslims entered a church and asked a monk to show him a clean place to pray. The monk replied: cleanse your heart of anything not Him and get up [to pray] wherever you want. The righteous Muslim said: I was ashamed of him. (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 137)

Al-Ḥarālī commented that neither of the two was right, and criticized the Muslim's attitude in particular, despite describing him as righteous:

He who follows the Qur'ān need not be ashamed of this speech [of the monk], for his heart is already purified from all that is not God. He must still purify his appearance, for God, being the Hidden One (*al-bāṭin*), loves the clarity of inwardness (*bawāṭin*). Still, being the Apparent One (*al-ẓāhir*), also He loves the righteousness of appearances (*ẓawāhir*). (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 137)

Al-Ḥarālī believes in the unity between appearance and inwardness, the exoteric and the esoteric, reflecting the unity of the divine Names, the Apparent and the Hidden. It is the same unity of body and heart:

Those who follow the Qur'ān worship God with heart and body. (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 138)

The author seeks to internalize Qur'ānic polemics by redirecting the discourse from criticism of others to criticism of oneself. Instead of casting blame on others to embellish one's own image as an escape or self-justification, the reader must transform the polemics into awareness and accountability, as self-criticism:

The reader has the right to draw the lessons (*ya'tabir*) from the Qur'ān to [see them] in himself, noting the locus of criticism of [religious] groups, to evaluate the states of his own soul [corresponding to] these religions, [and] not to be like that one who insults himself with the Qur'ān without realizing it. (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 138)

The fourth religion is that of the Sabians, “among them”, the worshippers of the stars, sun, moon, and planets. They were the first to worship a “sensitive celestial” (Harāllī 1997, p. 129). It is clear from the description of the Sabians that al-Ḥarāllī identified them with the Sabians of Ḥarrān, which is a much-debated issue in Islamic sources. His definition is in keeping with the Andalusians’ scant knowledge of Eastern religions, as with his compatriot Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) (cf. Mokrani 2008, pp. 301–14).

Al-Ḥarāllī severely condemned astrology and the belief in astral influence on human affairs as the cause of good or bad luck. This belief was widespread, “especially among kings, sultans and chiefs” (Harāllī 1997, p. 133). His criticism is based on the prophetic saying, “In three things in my community there is disbelief, and they will not be forsaken”, including asking for rain through the stars:

Those whose fear and hope are related to the impact of the stars are the Sabians of this community. (Harāllī 1997, p. 134)

It is a matter of associationism (*širk*), because the true believer fears and hopes only in God. In this context, the author cites a number of verses, from the story of Abraham to those affirming the creaturely nature of the sun, moon, and stars (Q 7, 54; 16, 12).

The fifth religion is that of the dualistic Zoroastrians (*al-mağūs al-ṭanawīyya*), who worship two deities: light and darkness (Harāllī 1997, p. 129). Zoroastrian dualism manifests itself among Muslims in “seeing acts, for good and evil, are from themselves, attributing God’s acts to his creatures”. The author gives the example of “believing that this fellow does good and the other does evil, and this one gives and the other prevents [...], filling books with poems, speeches, and letters of praise of God’s creatures for what they did not do, or of criticism for what they did not prevent. They thank creatures for God’s gifts and criticize them for what God has not granted”. He also criticizes the use of exaggerated titles and servile language, such as when saying “my lord and support” or “your servant and slave”. In this way, they “deny brotherhood in faith and equality among the creatures of the Merciful” (Harāllī 1997, p. 132).

Al-Ḥarāllī compares this attitude with that of the Nimrud, Pharaoh and people of power mentioned in the Qur’ān:

Have you not thought about the man who disputed with Abraham about his Lord because God had given him power to rule? When Abraham said, ‘It is my Lord who gives life and death,’ he said, ‘I too give life and death’ (Q 2, 258). (Harāllī 1997, p. 132)

Al-Ḥarāllī quotes a Ḥadīṭ often used in anti-Mu‘tazilite polemics about the doctrine of human being’s creation of his own actions: “al-Qadariyya are the Zoroastrians of this community” (Abū Dāwūd 2009, Ḥadīṭ 4691, vol. 7, p. 77). Without naming this theological school, the author states his theological-Sufi position, close to the Aṣ‘arite doctrine, which attributes the creation of all actions to God, without using the technical term “acquisition (*kasb*)”. In this sense, attributing actions to man contradicts *islām* as an act of submission and surrender to God, underscoring the ethical implications of this doctrine:

[...] The Muslim (*muslim*) (one who surrenders himself to God) surrenders (*aslama*) creation and command to his Lord [...] Whoever fears a creature or hopes in it, among those who believe and Muslims, is indeed among the Zoroastrians of this community. (Harāllī 1997, pp. 132–33)

Although sometimes subtle and hidden, it remains an attitude of associationism (*širk*). The true act of *islām* is revealed in verses like: “I have submitted (surrendered) myself to God, and those who follow me” (Q 3, 20), or “all creation and command belong to Him” (Q 7, 54) (Harāllī 1997, p. 133).

The sixth religion is that of the associationists (*al-mušrikūn*), sometimes translated as pagans or polytheists, who worship an “earthly tangible” (Harāllī 1997, p. 130). “The extension of the religion of those who have associated [God with another deity] (*allaḍīna ašrakū*) in this Umma” is manifested in the “subtle and hidden” worship of material goods and

wealth, referring to some Ḥadīṭ-s, “the idol (*ṣanam*) of my Umma, is the dinar and dirham”. “What has destroyed [the communities] that were there before you are the dinar and the dirham. And they will also destroy you” (Ibn Ḥibbān 1987, Ḥadīṭ 694, vol. 2, p. 469). The author also uses the metaphor of the “golden calf” to say that each community has its own calf, and that of this Umma is money (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 131).

There is no difference between the associationist who believes that the idol, made with his own hands, benefits him and the one who is tested (*maftūn*) of this Umma, who believes that the dinar and the dirham benefit him to the point of formulating a widespread proverb: ‘only your dirham benefits you’ [...]. The justification used by the associationists regarding their idols: ‘We only worship them because they bring us nearer to God’ (Q 39, 3), finds its equivalent in the saying of the tested one: ‘I love money only to do good and to dispense it in the ways of charity’. If he really wanted charity, it was better to abandon the accumulation of purchases and money. [...] [The one] who loves money, and its accumulation is the associationist of this Umma, [and the dinar and dirham] are his al-Lāt and al-Uzzā²⁴, which dissolve the word [of *tawḥīd*]. There is no god but God, for he has deified his own money (Ḥarālī 1997, pp. 131–32).

The seventh religion is that of the hypocrites (*al-munāfiqūn*). Their appearance is similar to that of the believers. While their truth is according to the five religions mentioned: the Jews, the Sabians, the Christians, and the Zoroastrians, “down to the lowest level of the associationists” (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 130), they are distinguished by patterns of being two-faced and of there being contradiction and inconsistency between their words and actions.

Hypocrisy is “the disaster of the reciters [of the Qur’ān] (*qurrā*)”, and the calamity of the people (*al-ḥalīqa*)”, reports the Ḥadīṭ: “Most of the hypocrites in my community are among the reciters” (Ibn Ḥanbal 1995, Ḥadīṭ-s 6633, 6634, 6637, vol. 6, pp. 193–95) (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 138). The cause of hypocrisy lies in “prioritizing the sacredness of people (*ḥurmat al-ḥalq*) over that of the Real (*ḥurmat al-Ḥaqq*)” (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 139). “It is a phenomenon that runs through all religions, characterized by an instability (*dabḍaba*)” (Q 4, 143), that oscillates between faith and unbelief. “Hypocrites are lazy in prayer and stingy in charity” (Q 9, 54), “seeking to diminish the qualities of virtuous people, ignoring their merits”. Indeed, the hypocrite “is annoyed by the good works of sincere people” while the true believer ignores both the faults of both the delinquent and the virtuous, focusing instead on his own shortcomings. The hypocrite seeks in religion what can serve his worldly purposes and affairs at the expense of eternal life and puts down what might harm his own selfish interests (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 139).

At the end of the third epistle, al-Ḥarālī concludes by saying that “every reader has the right to hear within himself the locus (*maṭwāqī*) of the Qur’ānic verses, in his own heart, in the states of his soul and the actions of his body, in his intimacy with the Lord, and in his public life with people. In this way, he finds the whole Qur’ān applicable to him, special to his case, as if it had not been revealed except for him [...] He listens to the Qur’ān as a communication from God without mediators”. This approach “opens the door to embrace Qur’ānic ethics, following the example of the Prophet”. As his wife ‘Ā’īsha describes him: “His character was the Qur’ān” (Ibn Ḥanbal 1995, Ḥadīṭ 25689, vol. 18, p. 60) (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 140).

5. Conclusions

In his interpretation of the Qur’ānic criticism of other religions, Al-Ḥarālī sometimes starts from extra-Qur’ānic sources. In the Qur’ān, for example, no criticism is directed at the Sabians or Zoroastrians. They are mentioned by name without any explanation. The author relies on Ḥadīṭ literature and on theological and historical sources to direct theological polemics towards educational and spiritual goals.

Al-Ḥarālī uses forms of religiosity known in the religious imagination, even outside Islamic circles, which risk being transformed into stereotypes. For example, he says that Jewish religiosity is typically legalistic and formal while Christian religiosity is spiritual and esoteric. He uses such patterns to reflect on their Islamic counterparts, particularly regarding the opposition between jurists and Sufis. According to him, sound religiosity

is realized in the complementarity of body and soul, of Judaism and Christianity, which ultimately leads to reconciliation between the Jurists and the Sufis. The Gospels represent the soul of the Torah, for it contains the principles of the Mosaic law, just as Sufism includes the principles and purposes of the *Šarī'a*. In this context, the Torah and the *Šarī'a* remain necessary because one worships God with body and soul, and the Qur'ānic and Mosaic ethics need concrete actions and deeds in life to fully manifest and exist. Al-Ḥarālī advocates unity and complementarity between these different aspects of religion, respecting a specific ethical hierarchy that distinguishes the highest level of ethics of holiness and the lowest but indispensable level of law.

Al-Ḥarālī not only interiorizes the Qur'ānic critique towards other religions by orienting it to the Muslims, but he also insists that all truth, goodness, and beauty in the Qur'ān are rooted in the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel, and previous Scriptures. In this sense, denying the validity of other religions is denying the validity of Islam and the Qur'ān.

Al-Ḥarālī totally ignores doctrinal Qur'ānic criticism, or at least what is often understood as criticism, such as the verses dealing with the Trinity (es. Q 5, 73) and the Incarnation (es. Q 2, 116). His interest is rather ethical. But still, one can guess his position from these elements:

1. In the category of *al-mutašābih*, the ambiguous, al-Ḥarālī sees the origin of doctrinal discord and of divisions between religions as well as divisions between theological schools of the same religion. The correct position of faith before God's speech about God is wise silence, with the exception of enlightening inspiration. Knowing one's limitations and stepping back before the Mystery closes the door to naive or malignant speculations.
2. Al-Ḥarālī recognizes the monotheistic origin of the three religions, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, and never attributes idolatry or associationism to these religions. He does do so, however, with the Zoroastrians, Sabians, and Arab pagans, stating that there are different levels of *širk*; some are hidden and can affect even Muslims.
3. In his language, al-Ḥarālī tries not to generalize any judgments, often using the exception of "among them (*minhum*)", even when his judgments are severe.
4. The concept of salvation (*nağāt*) is more ethical than doctrinal. Indeed, the doctrines of *tawḥīd*, belief in the one God, or the opposite, *širk*, are interpreted practically and ethically. Al-Ḥarālī states that the fully saved (*al-nāğūn bi-l-kulliyya*) are the true believers and the people of perfection and certainty, who are stable in faith (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 130), making no indication of their religious identity. Likewise, the category of those who believe but are unstable in their faith seems rather cross-cutting, having equivalents in the other Abrahamic religions as well. One can see that the classification criteria are rather ethical and not identitarian. Orthopraxis takes precedence over orthodoxy.

The epistles of al-Ḥarālī are not a treatise on the theology of religions. However, they do contain significant elements for this discipline that explain why the Sufi approach to the religious other is often characterized by greater openness. The fact that it is not a matter of condemning the other, but of recognizing one's own faults and seeking to correct them, rather than claiming false perfection, is a distinctive feature. This methodology of internalization is followed by Sufi masters before and after al-Ḥarālī, not only for Qur'ānic polemics but for the interpretation of all Qur'ānic narratives. Al-Sulamī's (d. 412/1021) interpretation of the golden calf, for example, sees it as a symbol of the ego (cf. Sulamī 2016, vol. 1, p. 59), as al-Ḥarālī mentions (Ḥarālī 1997, p. 131). Or consider Rūmī's (d. 672/1273) and Sulṭān Valad's (d. 712/1312) interpretation of the story of the birth of Jesus Christ in the Qur'ān as a symbol of the actualization of the potential of sainthood within the human being, the manifestation of the divine Self overcoming the falsehood of the ego (cf. Sulṭān Valad 1982, pp. 91–92). We find the same internalizing interpretation in the Prophetic Tradition, such as the Ḥadīth that speaks of the great *ğihād*, the inner one, and the small *ğihād*, the outer and warlike one (cf. Bayhaqī 1987, Ḥadīth 373, p. 165). It is also found in the pre-Islamic Scriptures, for example, in the story of the adulterous

woman, when Jesus says, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (Jn 8, 7).

If we want to use a modern label to describe al-Ḥarālī’s theology of religions, one could say that his approach is inclusivist.²⁵ The perfection of Islam lies in the inclusion of the heritage of other religions, in which unity and fulfillment are found, without replacement or abrogation. Islam is the summum bonum of divine gifts through prophethood and revelation throughout history. Denial of the goodness of others thus becomes a denial of one’s own goodness. One should start with oneself if one wants to criticize, because all human beings share the same weaknesses and frailties.

The methodology offered by al-Ḥarālī is helpful for the new Islamic theology of religions because it allows for an ‘apologetical’ ethical view of the religious other. Theology is no longer a weapon to exclude different groups, and identity is no longer a fortress that sees the weakness of others as a necessity to ground its glory and perfection. In emerging comparative theology, we seek to learn from the sources of other religions, to have a direct knowledge that appreciates and respects the religious other, without ambitions of supremacy or hidden agendas.

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Notes

- ¹ Sufi literature sometimes contains implicit or explicit polemics (cf. [Lipton 2018](#)). However, it dares to accept and appreciate the existence of positive elements in other religions.
- ² This article adopts the pronunciation “al-Ḥarālī” used by some sources like al-Biqā’ī ([Biqā’ī 2011](#), vol. 1, p. 7). It also resembles the name of his village of origin, Ḥarālla.
- ³ For a historical and geographical survey on this location, Firas Casewit’s unpublished thesis is the most up-to-date scholarly work on al-Ḥarālī’s biography and work in European languages (cf. [F. Casewit 2019](#), pp. 17–27). The most comprehensive study in Arabic is that of Mohammadi Elkhayati ([Elkhayati 2011](#)).
- ⁴ Al-Mundirī (m. 656/1258) is the only one who mentioned Ceuta as his birthplace and attributed his origin to the village of Buršāna, near Seville ([Mundirī 1985](#), vol. 3, p. 560, nr. 2987). Marrakech is the birthplace most mentioned by biographers since Ibn al-Abbār (m. 658/1260) ([Ibn al-Abbār 1994](#), vol. 3, p. 251, nr. 631).
- ⁵ In this narration, Ibn ‘Arabī jokingly said: “two heretics (*zindīq*), do not meet in one place” ([Ibn al-Ṭawwāḥ 2007](#), p. 90).
- ⁶ In al-Ḥarālī’s work, there are some indications that show a Shiite influence, such as the necessity of the presence of a Risen one for God with proof (*Qā’im li-llāh bi-ḥuḡḡa*) ([Ḥarālī 1997](#), p. 27), a typically Imāmī expression used especially for the Hidden Imam; or that the Imam is a source of teaching after God and the Prophet ([Ḥarālī 1997](#), p. 85). Ibn Taymiyya accuses al-Ḥarālī of being influenced by a certain “Ismā’īlī Batinism” ([Ibn Taymiyya 2000](#), p. 405).
- ⁷ Al-Dahabī puts the story in the context of a playful game of a man who wanted to prove to his friends that he could provoke al-Ḥarālī, who was famous for his calm and humility ([Dahabī 1998](#), vol. 46, p. 337).
- ⁸ On the origins of Ibn Ḥazm (cf. [García-Sanjuán 2013](#)).
- ⁹ One line before, the author mentioned the importance of “enhancing kinship and Abrahamic religion” (*taṭwīq al-raḥīm wa al-milla al-ibrāhīmiyya*) ([Ibn al-Ṭawwāḥ 2007](#), p. 99). Belonging to the Abrahamic origin is seen as a spiritual kinship between the three monotheistic religions.
- ¹⁰ The Qur’ānic quotations are taken from ([Abdel Haleem 2004](#)) and ([Itani 2012](#)), with modifications if necessary. The letter Q indicates the Qur’ān; the first number indicates the sūra number; the second one shows the verse number (Ḥafṣ numeration).
- ¹¹ Among the earliest studies on al-Ḥarālī, when his work was all in manuscript form, was the posthumous study of Paul Nwyia ([Nwyia 1990](#), pp. 167–95).
- ¹² Not to be confused with the famous Qur’ān commentator, al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273).
- ¹³ Rightly, Yousef Casewit translates the term *ītibār* as “acquiring empirical knowledge of the self” ([Y. Casewit 2019](#), p. 269).
- ¹⁴ The expression *mā šā’ Allāh*, literally “as God wills”, indicates an abundant quantity in this context.

- 15 The author uses two terms: *taṭrīb*, which means enchantment or ecstasy caused by music, which is the camel driver's (*ḥaddā'*) singing that encourages camels to run fast.
- 16 The author's theory on the seven *aḥruf* is based on a Ḥadīth narrated by Ibn Mas'ūd that mentions the same terms (Ibn Ḥibbān 1987, Ḥadīth 745, vol. 3, p. 20).
- 17 *Biḍār* in some manuscripts, but the editor preferred another version, *bi-ḍār*, so the meaning becomes: "in the house of love."
- 18 According to Warš' reading, prevalent in the Islamic West, to wit, Andalusia, Maghreb, and Western Africa, *al-ḥamd* is the first word of the first verse. This indicates the author's origins. In Ḥafṣ version, the *basmla* is the first verse.
- 19 *Muḥsinūn*, or people of *iḥsān* (Ḥarāllī 1997, p. 137), which is a polysemantic term that means doing good and the beautiful, loveliness, charity, or awareness of the divine Presence. *Iḥsān* is among the key terms of Ḥadīth Ḡibrīl (Muslim 1991, K. al-īmān, Ḥadīth 1, pp. 36–37), which will be mentioned later.
- 20 See expressions like "a group among" (*farīq min*) that indicate the exception in the Qur'ān in verses criticizing other religions (Q 2, 101; 3, 100 and others). The Qur'ān explicitly condemns generalized judgment that turns into prejudice: "they are not all alike" (Q 3, 113).
- 21 This refers to the Umayyads, who transformed the Caliphate into a hereditary power.
- 22 Literally, "the solidarity of Islam" (*ta'āḍud al-islām*).
- 23 The author distinguishes between true Jurists (*fuqahā'*) and pseudo-Jurists (*mutafaqqiḥa*). Those who are false, by definition, are anti-Sufi. In the same way, he distinguishes between true Sufis and false ones.
- 24 Arab pagan female deities mentioned in the Qur'ān (Q 53, 19).
- 25 Al-Ḥarāllī's approach to other religions is similar to what Paul Knitter calls: "the fulfillment model, the one fulfills the many" (Knitter 2002, pp. 61–106).

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